

RECOVERING FROM CARDIAC INTERVENTION

**USEFUL INFORMATION FROM THE PRACTICES OF
DRS MABIN AND ABELSON**

This booklet has been produced to help you to recover from your coronary angioplasty or stent insertion as quickly and safely as possible. It is for your relatives or carers too. It is suitable for adults of all ages.

The information should help with some of your questions. There is advice about what you can do to make a speedy recovery. Simple exercises to do in the first few weeks after your angioplasty are described. There is information about diet, your medicines, and when you can start doing certain activities again. There is a section about stress and how to deal with it.

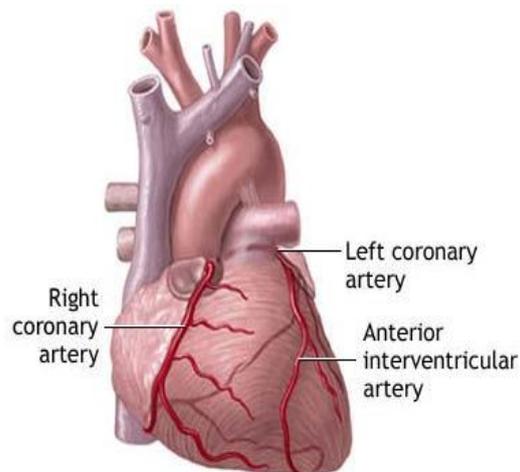
The booklet has information about cardiac rehabilitation and support groups in your area, and useful addresses and telephone numbers.

Please take time to look at this. We hope that you find it helpful.

Your Heart

Your heart is a pump made of muscle. It works non-stop throughout your life pumping blood around your body. Your blood carries oxygen from the air you breathe, and food from your stomach and gut to supply your body with all it needs to work. Your heart needs oxygen and food too. It gets these from its own blood supply - the coronary arteries.

What is coronary heart disease?



Usually there is nothing wrong with your heart - indeed, it is the strongest muscle you have. Your heart trouble has been caused by problems in your **coronary arteries**. Parts of your coronary arteries have become narrowed over time. This is sometimes known as hardening of the arteries or *arteriosclerosis*. It is very common. Most people have some narrowing of their arteries as they grow older.

When the coronary arteries become narrow the blood supply to your heart is not so good. When your body needs more blood - usually when you exert

yourself - your heart has to pump harder. It needs more blood itself. The heart muscle hurts when it does not have the supply of blood it needs - this is **angina pain**. This pain usually gets better with rest and with nitrate drugs like Isordil/Angised. Emotional upset or extremes of temperature can also cause angina pain.

A **heart attack** happens when part of the coronary arteries becomes blocked. One part of the heart muscle does not get its blood supply and is damaged. Resting or taking Isordil does not completely relieve pain caused by a heart attack.

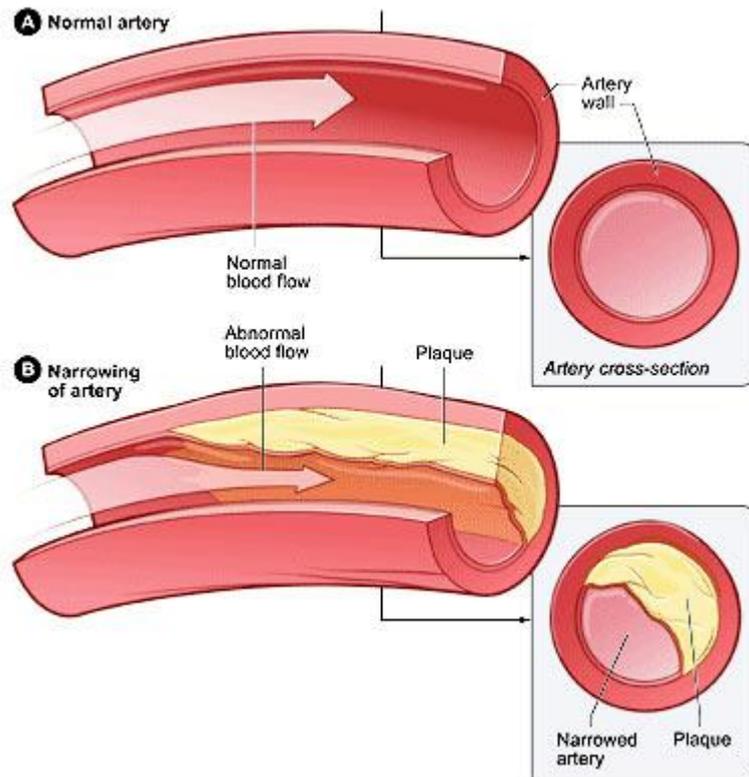
Why do the coronary arteries become narrowed?

Over a long time (perhaps starting when you were a teenager), a fatty layer builds up on the inside of your arteries. This layer gets thicker and thicker. Some parts of your arteries may become very narrow. Then it is difficult for your blood to get through. Usually there are only a few parts of your coronary arteries where there is this narrowing.

Sometimes your arteries deal with this local problem by growing new blood vessels in that part of your heart.

There is a danger of narrowed arteries becoming blocked by clotted blood sticking to the artery wall.

This picture below shows a bit of coronary artery becoming narrower and narrower as it becomes blocked up with a fatty layer.



Risk factors for heart disease include high levels of cholesterol in your blood, smoking, lack of exercise, and high blood pressure. These factors speed up the narrowing of the coronary arteries. There is more information about the risk factors in the section about maintaining a healthy heart.

What can I do about coronary artery disease?

There is a lot that can be done to treat this problem. **Coronary artery bypass graft surgery** creates a bypass route around the narrowed artery or arteries to improve the blood flow to the heart.

Angioplasty (stretching an artery open), and putting in **stents** are ways to reopen the arteries that have narrowed.



There is **medicine** that helps to control coronary artery disease. (Page 15)

You can do a lot to reduce the risk of narrowing arteries and to stay well after this procedure. Take a look at the section on maintaining a healthy heart for ideas about staying well (page 28).

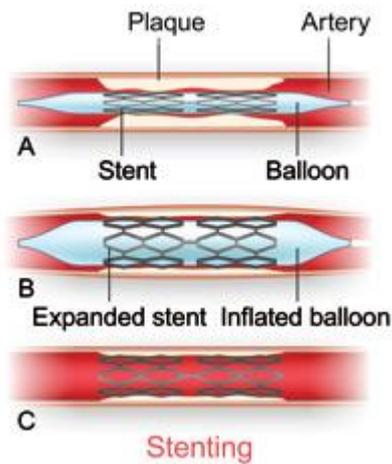
About angioplasty

Angioplasty is widely used to treat blockages or narrowing in the coronary arteries. The aims are to help you return to a fuller and more active life, and to reduce your risk of future heart problems.

A small puncture is needed in the groin or arm. Local anaesthetic is used to reduce any discomfort. A small hollow tube on a wire called a catheter is guided into an artery and along to your heart. Using X-ray pictures as guidance, the catheter is positioned where the narrowing is. A balloon is inflated to open the artery and improve blood flow. A stent (a metal tube to hold open an artery) is usually left in larger arteries. The catheter with its deflated balloon is then removed.

The procedure may be quite simple and completed in 20 minutes or so. Sometimes it can be technically difficult and take much longer.

Recovery immediately after the procedure involves resting. If the catheter was inserted in your groin, then you need to keep fairly still for several hours to allow the insertion site to heal.



After angioplasty or stent insertion

Most people do not need to be in hospital for long after this treatment. It is normal to go home the same or following day. Your heart is hopefully working much better straight after the treatment now that it has a better blood supply. You may find that you can immediately start to do much more than before. Don't forget that your level of fitness before the procedure will affect how much you can do. You may need to build up your activities gradually to increase your fitness.

Most people do make a straightforward recovery. However you may notice some after-effects of this treatment. Here are some ideas about what you can do about these. The good news is that these will usually clear up with time.

Bruising: It is normal to have bruising around the puncture site. You may discover a hard lump around the wound, especially if your wound is in your groin. This should resolve over time. Contact your GP surgery if you notice that the area has become inflamed and red, or if you have any concerns about the healing in this area. Take paracetamol for pain relief if necessary.

Constipation: This may happen because of your tablets or because you are less active than normal. Eating plenty of foods high in fibre like fruit, vegetables and grains, drinking plenty of water and exercising may help. Your GP or practice nurse can advise you about dealing with this.

Chest pain: You may experience mild chest pain or ache following angioplasty and stent insertion, especially if several stents were put in place. This can take several weeks to settle.

Tingling and numbness: Some people notice tingling or numbness in their leg. This is due to the local anaesthetic and will settle after a few days.

Angioplasty is an effective treatment for most people. However, a few people may not get a long-lasting benefit. The coronary arteries may start to narrow again. Use your Isordil spray if you think you are experiencing angina (see page 18). Contact your general practitioner if this continues. Don't forget that there is a range of treatments for angina.

Exercise after angioplasty or stent insertion

One of the great benefits of these heart treatments is being able to do more. Taking exercise will:

- ♥ Make you feel good
- ♥ Help your heart recover
- ♥ Help you to sleep better
- ♥ Build up your fitness
- ♥ Lower your blood pressure
- ♥ Help you have a healthy weight
- ♥ Lower your cholesterol levels
- ♥ Help your heart stay well

Spending most of your time lying or sitting down will not help your heart recover and could cause problems. Don't be put off if you have arthritis or another physical problem - indeed, exercise may help.

When should I start to exercise?

If you've had a groin puncture, avoid physical activity for 2 days - to prevent bleeding from the leg artery.

You should have no angina and more energy after the procedure. However, you may feel stiff around your wound. Try to balance activity with rest.

What should I do?

Walking is a great way of exercising - you can go at your own pace, and walk as far as you like.

Choose a route that allows you to rest if you want to - a wall or bench to sit on. Bit by bit build up the length of your walk. As you feel fitter, try walking up a slight slope or walk more briskly. You might aim to be walking 1 - 2 km (about 30 to 60 minutes) or even 3 - 5 km by six weeks after your treatment. However, everyone is different - plan your exercise to suit you and your recovery.

How can I tell if I am exercising at the right level?

Your breathing will tell you if you are exercising in a way that will help your heart. Aim to exercise so that your heart rate goes up and you are slightly out of breath. You should still be able to talk. You should not feel exhausted. Slow down or take a shorter walk if you find that you are uncomfortable and very breathless.

What else can I do if I can't walk, or the weather is bad?

Try these home exercises. As with walking, start slowly and build up. To start with, try to repeat each exercise for about 30 seconds and build up.

Warm up first by starting slowly and gently.

- Exercise 1: Heel raises on the spot**
Hold on to the back of a chair or the wall. Slowly raise your body up onto your toes, then lower back down.
- Exercise 2: Marching on the spot**
March briskly on the spot, raising your legs and swinging your arms gently.
- Exercise 3: Sit to stand**
Sit on a firm stool or dining chair, not a soft armchair. Lean forwards and stand up. Sit down again.
- Exercise 4: Step-ups**
Use the bottom step of some stairs. Place one foot fully on the step. Step up with the other leg to stand with both feet on the step. Then step down again.
- Exercise 5: Free arm movements**
Slowly raise both hands and touch your shoulders. Gently raise your arms over your head and stretch up to the ceiling. Slowly lower them again. Breathe in as you raise your arms and breathe out as you lower them.

Remember to:

- ♥ Warm up and cool down when exercising - let your heart rate gradually go up - start and finish at a gentle pace.
- ♥ Wear comfortable loose clothing.
- ♥ Choose activities that you enjoy.
- ♥ Rest if you need to.
- ♥ Stop if you experience chest pain.
- ♥ Avoid exercising straight after a meal - wait for two hours.
- ♥ Avoid exercise if you feel unwell.
- ♥ Recognise your own achievements and don't compare yourself with others.
- ♥ Keep it up!

The exercise you do at home will help develop your fitness. It will also help you to get the most from the cardiac rehabilitation programs - more about these later.

How can I keep myself fit for life?

Physical activity is something that you can do to keep yourself fit and well into the future. Try to keep up your exercise and activities. Here are some ideas about how to keep yourself motivated:

- ♥ Remind yourself of all the benefits you can get from exercise.
- ♥ Remember that exercise will protect your heart.
- ♥ It increases your energy levels and boosts your mood.
- ♥ It doesn't have to cost you anything - walking is a simple and good way to keep fit.
- ♥ Choose activities that you enjoy and find satisfying.
- ♥ Make it part of your daily routine.
- ♥ Make a habit of climbing the stairs rather than using lifts.
- ♥ Walk rather than use the bus or car for short distances.
- ♥ Involve a friend or with your family - make it sociable.
- ♥ Arrange to go to a regular exercise class.
- ♥ Do not put off starting exercising again if you have stopped.
- ♥ Find out about exercise facilities, classes, and walking groups in your area - join in - try it and see.
- ♥ Make a plan of the activities you would like to do - make it fun.

Try using the planner at the end of this booklet:

- ♥ Keeping a record of your activities may help to keep you motivated and will show you what you have achieved over time. There is an example at the end of this booklet. Try it and see if it helps.

Where can I get more information about exercise facilities?

- ♥ Cardiac rehabilitation staff

- ♥ Your local library, local newspapers, telephone directory
- ♥ Cardiac support groups
- ♥ Your GP
- ♥ Other people who have had angioplasty

There is a list of useful contact telephone numbers and addresses at the back of this information booklet.

“My own experience, having been operated on at the age of 76 and now approaching 80, is that I have been able to undertake all the exercises recommended in the booklet without any ill effects at all, and have in fact found them to be highly enjoyable.”

Activities and tasks - When can I ... ?

- ♥ Remember, **everyone is different.**
- ♥ Aim to take things at your **own** pace and increase activities a bit at a time.
- ♥ Try to be as active as you can to help your heart recover.
- ♥ Build up your activities day by day. Do things that you enjoy.

Back to work One week, depending on the nature of work and hours

Bath/shower Straight away

Bowls and golf One week

Cooking Straight away

Cycling/dancing/jogging	Two weeks. Excellent for your heart.
Decorating	One week
Driving	Do not drive for at least one week (4 weeks if you have had a heart attack or acute coronary syndrome). Inform your insurance company - your insurance may have to be altered.
Fishing	One week
Gardening	Weeding - one week. Digging, grass mowing - two weeks.
Getting up and getting Dressed	Straight away
Having visitors	Any time, but do not be afraid to limit your visitors and telephone calls. Protect your rest time.
Holidays/air travel	Leave flying for at least one week and check with your doctor. You must inform your travel insurance company. Wear anti-embolic stockings to prevent clots forming in your legs. During long journeys, take regular opportunities to walk and stretch your legs.
Housework	Dusting, washing up - one week. Vacuuming, changing beds, ironing - one week.
Lifting/pulling/pushing	Nothing heavy for two weeks or until wound has healed.

Night out	When you feel ready.
Sex	Whenever you feel ready after three days.
Shopping	Newspaper - straight away. Supermarket trolley and carrying bags - one week.
Stairs	The day after treatment.
Swimming	Excellent exercise. You can start swimming after one week. More vigorous swimming can start two weeks later.

If you have any questions about starting or increasing activities, speak to the cardiac rehabilitation staff or your doctor.

Your medicines

Medicines play a vital part in your recovery. They help to avoid further problems and control symptoms.

- ♥ It is important to take your tablets regularly. Follow the directions on the bottle. Don't let yourself run out of tablets.
- ♥ Painkillers are better at preventing pain, and not so good at dealing with severe pain. If you experience troublesome pain it is better to take painkillers sooner than to wait until the pain is really bad.
- ♥ If you take regular medicine, do not stop it suddenly. Your body needs time to adjust to managing without it.
- ♥ Do not take double doses if you forget to take your medicine.
- ♥ If side-effects are a problem, contact your doctor as soon as possible.
- ♥ It is a good idea to carry a list of your medicines in your jacket or handbag. If a doctor or dentist wants to prescribe something for you,

they can check your list of current medicines. Show your list of medication at each consultation or treatment.

- ♥ Always let the pharmacist know what prescribed drugs you are taking if you buy anything over the counter.

Drugs to reduce the chance of blood clots forming

Aspirin

Reduces the “stickiness” of blood.

Take with or after breakfast. Take in smaller doses than you would take to relieve a headache.

Side effects: can cause indigestion, nausea and vomiting.

Stomach problems can often be overcome by taking with food.

If trouble continues, speak to your doctor.

Warfarin

This is also a drug to prevent your blood from clotting. It is often used for people with heart valve trouble or with an irregular heart rhythm.

Different people need different doses. You need regular blood tests at the pathologists when taking this drug. If your warfarin level becomes too high, you may notice that you bruise easily, or get nose bleeds, or even blood in your urine or stools. If this happens report it to your GP or pathologists straight away.

Avoid aspirin when taking warfarin unless told to do so by your consultant. Paracetamol is the safest painkiller to take if you are taking warfarin. Drink only small amounts of alcohol. Check with the pharmacist before buying any other medicines. Always tell your doctor that you are taking warfarin if your treatment is being changed.

Clopidogrel Action similar to aspirin and can be used instead of aspirin for some people. Usually used in addition to aspirin for a spell following angioplasty and stenting to reduce the risk of blood clotting. Check with your doctor about how long you need to take both drugs together. If you need a painkiller - try taking paracetamol.

Betablockers These drugs reduce the effects of natural adrenaline and have been shown to reduce the risk of further heart attacks. They are useful in preventing attacks of angina, lowering blood pressure, and treating some sorts of abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias).
Betablockers include: Atenolol (Tenormin), Bisoprolol (Concor, Bilacor, Bisocor), and Sotalol.
Betablockers are not usually given to people with asthma.
Betablockers do have some side-effects which some people find troublesome, and these may disappear after a short time or if the dose is reduced. You may experience cold hands and feet, tiredness, sleep disturbances, impotence, dizziness and slow heart rate. Contact your doctor if you have bad side-effects. You should not stop taking these tablets suddenly.

Calcium Channel Blockers This sort of medicine increases the blood supply to the heart and reduces the work of the heart by relaxing the arteries. They are often used to treat angina or high blood pressure. Common drugs from this group are: Diltiazem (Zildem), Amlodipine (Norvasc, Amloc), Verapamil (Calcicard, Ravamil, Verahexal). Side effects include flushing, headache, dizziness, ankle swelling and

constipation. See your doctor if these side-effects are a problem.

Diltiazem and Verapamil may also be used for treating some sorts of abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias).

ACE Inhibitors

Ace-inhibitors are used to treat high blood pressure and heart failure (when the heart is not pumping as effectively as it should), and sometimes are given after a heart attack. The treatment opens the blood vessels to allow the heart to pump more easily. These drugs include: Lisinopril (Zestril), Enalapril (Pharmapres, Renitec), Perindopril (Coversyl / Prexum), Ramipril.

Side effects include dizziness, a metallic taste, skin rash and dry cough. Your doctor may arrange for your blood to be tested. This is to check that your kidneys are alright.

Diuretics

(Water tablets) Used to treat high blood pressure and heart failure. They get rid of extra water and salt in your urine, and relieve congestion in your circulation.

You will need to use the toilet frequently for a few hours after taking these tablets so find a time of day that suits you. Unless your doctor has told you to restrict your fluid intake, make sure that you drink just enough to avoid feeling thirsty. These drugs are: Hydrochlorthiazide (Ridaq / Adco-retic), Indapamide (Dapamax, Natrilix), Furosemide (Lasix / Puresis), Bumetanide (Burinex), Torasemide (Unat). Side effects occasionally include light-headedness, muscle cramps, stomach upsets and impotence.

Drugs used to treat angina

Nitrates

This sort of treatment works by opening your veins and arteries and by increasing the blood supply to the heart. Nitrates relieve angina pain and treat heart failure.

Glyceryl trinitrate (GTN) is mainly used to relieve sudden attacks of angina pain. It is used as a tablet (to be placed under your tongue, not swallowed) or spray. It will usually relieve the pain in 5 minutes.

If the pain is not any better:

- ♥ Take 2 sprays or 1 tablet
- ♥ If no better after 5 more minutes, take another 2 sprays or 1 tablet
- ♥ If still no better after another 5 minutes, again take 2 sprays or 1 tablet
- ♥ If the pain is still there after a further 5 minutes, get help urgently
- ♥ **DO NOT WAIT LONGER THAN 15 MINUTES**

Use GTN to prevent angina when you are about to do something that usually brings on an angina attack. You can remove the tablet from your mouth later to reduce side-effects. GTN tablets are only effective for 8 weeks after you open the bottle. **The tablets or spray can be bought without a prescription if needed at short notice.**

Isosorbide mononitrate (ISMN)/Dinitrate: Imdur/ Monicor / Elaltan LA. A slower release, longer acting nitrate. Usually taken daily - swallowed.

Cholesterol (lipid) lowering drugs

Statins/fibrates These drugs lower the amount of cholesterol in the blood. They include Simvastatin (Zocor), Pravastatin

(Prava), Fluvastatin (Lescol), Atorvastatin (Lipitor, Aspavor) or Crestor.

Statins should be taken at night to be most effective. Side effects include nausea, headaches, diarrhoea or constipation, and inflammation of muscles (rare). You must tell your doctor of any unexpected muscle pain, tenderness or weakness.

Anti-arrhythmic drugs

These are drugs for controlling the heart rhythm and to treat heart failure. These include Amiodarone (Cordarone X, Hexarone, Arycor), Digoxin (Lanoxin).

If you take Digoxin, you will be on a dose to suit your weight. Your blood levels may be monitored.

Amiodarone can take a while to have its full effect. It is therefore given in large doses to start with, and is then reduced. You need to have a blood check every 6 months to check the effect of this medicine on your liver and thyroid. You may become more sensitive to sunlight, so cover up your skin on sunny days, and use sun block.

Side effects of these drugs include loss of appetite, nausea, sickness, headache, flushing and dizziness.

Painkillers

Paracetamol A good painkiller for mild to moderate pain, and helps if you have a fever. It has very few reported side effects. You must not take more than the recommended dose. Take 1-2 tablets 4 times a day. No more than 8 tablets in 24 hours.

Codeine/ These are opioid drugs helpful for moderate levels of pain. They **Dihydrocodeine** are stronger than paracetamol, but have more side-effects. They should be taken 4 times in 24

hours. Best taken with food to avoid nausea and vomiting.

They can also lead to drowsiness and

Constipation so be careful about driving or operating machinery.

Co-codamol is a mixture of paracetamol and codeine.

NSAID's

Ibuprofen,

helpful for

(Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) These include

Diclofenac, Naproxen and Indomethacin. These are

reducing inflammation and pain. Especially pain caused by muscle strain, bone pain and arthritis. They should be taken with food to protect your stomach. Side effects: some of these drugs may cause stomach irritation and bleeding, nausea, diarrhoea, rashes and swelling of the face in some people. Some are available with a coating to protect your stomach (EC tablets). If you are allergic to aspirin, do not use these tablets. Do not take these drugs if you have asthma, raised blood pressure or heart failure, or if you are taking ACE inhibitor medication, unless advised to by your doctor.

Tramadol

Opioid painkiller, which affects your nervous system. It is used for moderate to severe pain. Side effects may include nausea and vomiting, constipation, low blood pressure and hallucinations in some people. Take great care - if driving or operating machinery.

It may help you to keep a record of your medication, how much and how often you take it and any comments you have about it. There is a chart at the back of this booklet to record your medication.

“Keep smiling. You’ve got to take life in both your hands and make it happen.”

Managing stress and tension

It is common to experience some anxiety after heart treatments, especially on leaving hospital. Some people think that stress played a part in their heart problem. Family members often feel very anxious. Many people start to feel more confident over the following weeks. For others stress can remain a problem.

There is evidence that reducing stress and tension can help your heart recover. This section will explain more about what is happening to you when you feel stressed and anxious. It suggests things you can do for yourself to make you feel better.

What is stress?

If you find it difficult to get off to sleep at night, or are prone to worrying a lot, or have butterflies in your stomach, you may be experiencing some stress. Stress can be short-lasting, or can go on for months or years. Stress that wears us down can affect our health and well-being.

Stress changes our body chemistry - more adrenalin is in our blood. This leads to all sorts of normal signs and symptoms. You may experience:

- ♥ **Physical symptoms:** pounding heart, breathlessness, sweating
- ♥ **Unhelpful thoughts:** *I can't cope, I'll have a heart attack*
- ♥ **Difficult emotions:** anxious, frustrated, low, irritable
- ♥ **Stress-related behaviours:** rushing, overeating, avoidance

One symptom can lead to another in a cycle. So, for example, you might notice that you are breathless and tired after a walk. This might make you **feel** worried. You might **think** “I’m never going to get over this”, “the slightest exercise makes me pant”, and “what if this damages my heart?” These thoughts might make you anxious. To feel safer you may **avoid** going out alone, or stop your exercise program. Exercise is a safe and important aspect of recovering from heart problems, but stress can get in the way.

Pains, including chest pain, a racing heart and breathlessness are common signs of stress. The more stressed you are, the more uncomfortable the symptoms become. Following angioplasty or stent insertion, it is normal to be more aware of and worry about your heart. The worry may leave you even more stressed and the symptoms may get worse.

Checking

Some people regularly check their pulse, or monitor their blood pressure to make sure that everything is alright. This checking can be unhelpful. Instead of making you feel reassured, checking can make you more worried and more aware of physical symptoms.

Breathing

Even low levels of stress can speed up your breathing. Over-breathing can cause many of the symptoms already mentioned - feeling dizzy, tingly and uncomfortable, and even panicky.

Panic attacks

You might have a churning stomach, a racing heart, rapid breathing, dizziness, and sweating. You might have a feeling of terrible fear and a pressing need to escape or call for help.

These attacks are the body's normal reaction to a feeling of threat or danger. It prepares the body to respond quickly to danger. It is an unhelpful reaction if it is caused by everyday stress and worry.

It is a horrible feeling, but panic attacks will not do you any harm. In fact, the panicky feelings will pass even if you do nothing at all.

Here are some ways of dealing with stress and tension:

If you practise the following advice, you could find a great improvement. Don't be put off if this doesn't happen straight away. It takes time to change your response to stress - weeks or months. If you know someone who will be supportive, tell them what you are trying to do. They can

encourage you to take the time you need to practise new skills like relaxation.

1. Relaxation

Research evidence shows that people who practise relaxation improve their heart's recovery.

Try starting to practise relaxation every day. A relaxation tape/cd may guide you. With practice you may find that you can recognise tension and relax in a few minutes or less. There are all sorts of ways to relax. Try to slow down and relax completely at least once a day. Slow down and make time for a lazy bath, a walk, music, a good book or radio or TV program. If you allow yourself to relax you will get more done with the time left because you are refreshed. Try it and see.

2. Think about your breathing

Breathing techniques are a good relaxation method:

Try this:

- ♥ Lie down or sit with good support
- ♥ Place your hands on your stomach - your stomach should move out slightly as you breathe in, and drop back as you breathe out. Your chest should not move at all.
- ♥ Take a breath in, and then out **slowly**. Allow yourself to feel heavier and more relaxed as you breathe out. Continue breathing gently to this rhythm for a few minutes.
- ♥ With practice you will be able to go into this comfortable breathing style when you feel tense.

3. Exercise

Regular physical activity that you enjoy is a good way to reduce stress (and is very important for a healthy heart too). Walking, swimming, dancing, going to an exercise class - all sorts of activities are good for burning up adrenalin and relaxing tense muscles.

It may also help you feel more confident in yourself. Try to make time for some physical activity every day.

4. Plan your time

Are you someone who is always on the go, rushing and restless? Here are some ideas:

- ♥ Take time to list all the tasks you have to do and write them down. Include time for relaxation and pleasure.
- ♥ Ask yourself how much each task really matters.
- ♥ Ask yourself whether it has to be you? Who else can help?
- ♥ Choose the most important tasks to do first. Leave the tasks that don't matter.
- ♥ Do one task at a time.
- ♥ If a task seems too big, try to break it into smaller tasks.
- ♥ Pace yourself. Stop rushing. Have a break. Relax. You will get on better if you feel relaxed and refreshed.
- ♥ At the end of the day, be pleased with what you have achieved.
- ♥ You can learn to take life at a more relaxed pace and still achieve a lot.

5. Be aware of any unhelpful thoughts

The way you think about things may be causing stress. You may be able to change your unhelpful thinking and feel better. Here are some ideas:

Avoid negative thinking

Dwelling on bad things will probably leave you feeling low. Try to balance these thoughts with the ordinary and good things that happen each day. When things go wrong, try to be forgiving towards yourself and others. Ask yourself how much it really matters?

Worrying is not helpful, and does not prevent problems from happening. Again, try to balance worries with thoughts about things that do go your way; remind yourself of how you have managed to cope in the past.

Avoiding “should”, “ought to” and “must” thinking

Ask yourself who is setting these rules. Are you setting too high a standard?
Relax your standards if you are stressing yourself.

Unhelpful beliefs

Your thinking may be influenced by mistaken beliefs about your heart and its effects on your life. For example: *I will always have a weak heart. I must be very careful or I might damage the artery.* Even: *I have a heart problem - my life is over - I'm useless now.*

These are common unhelpful beliefs that are false. Here are some questions to help you question and change unhelpful thoughts:

1. Is this a fact or just a thought?
2. Is there a more helpful way of thinking about this?

Remember, for the majority of people, these sorts of heart treatments allow you to do **more**.

6. Watch out for avoidance

After your treatment you may feel cautious about getting back into the swing of things. Fears of causing problems might make you avoid exerting yourself, or going out much. In fact, it is very important to develop your hearts strength. Gradual exercise is very important in recovery. As soon as possible, start getting out and about. You might have to build up slowly and pace yourself to start with. Going to a rehabilitation program is a very good way to develop your confidence and return to your everyday activities. If you are stuck, talk to your cardiac rehabilitation contact, or your GP, who may be able to help.

Sex is good for your heart

If you have enjoyed a sexual relationship in the past, then it is **safe** to develop this again after angioplasty or stent insertion.

In fact, sex puts no more strain on your heart than taking a brisk walk. If you can manage walking without chest pain for being puffed out, then you are certainly fit enough to enjoy sex if you want to. Heart problems occurring during sexual activity are very rare.

Here are some points that may help:

- ♥ There is no right or wrong time to start sexual activity following heart treatment - discuss it with your partner. Make a start when you feel physically and emotionally ready.
- ♥ Work towards intercourse gradually. Spend more time kissing, caressing, cuddling and with foreplay. This allows your heart rate to gradually increase. It should also help you both to develop confidence again.
- ♥ If you develop chest pain or become very breathless, stop and take your Isordil spray or tablets. You can use your Isordil before sex if you think it helpful. Be careful with Nitroglycerine patches or cream - these may rub off on your partner and give them a nasty headache!
- ♥ **You cannot take Viagra if you take nitrate medications** (Isordil spray or buccal tablets, Imdur, Monicor, Elantan LA, Isosorbide mononitrate or dinitrate) - it can lead to dangerous drops in your blood pressure.
- ♥ As you feel up to it, enjoy a full range of sexual activity.
- ♥ Problems with sex drive or sexual responses? Feeling nervous about resuming sexual activity may be the problem. A few initial disappointments are normal - don't be put off. Talk with your partner and aim to build up gradually. Some drugs may cause problems - speak to your doctor who may alter the dose or try a different brand of medicine. Don't be afraid to ask for help - there is often a simple answer. If difficulties continue, or if you have had long-standing trouble, your doctor can assess this and may refer you for specialist help.

Aim to return to your past sexual activity in your own time, and enjoy it!

Returning to work

If you are of working age, returning to work will help you recover some normality in your life. Indeed, rehabilitation aims to help you return with greater vigour to your usual activities, including work. If you have any questions or concerns about getting back to work, speak to your doctor or rehabilitation nurse. Your local re-employment officer is another good source of help.

Maintaining a healthy heart

Your angioplasty or stent insertion treatment has treated some of the problems caused by narrowed arteries. But these treatments do not change the reasons that you had narrowed coronary arteries in the first place. To get the best from your treatment it is very important that you do what you can to prevent further artery narrowing. Here are some ideas:

Healthy food for a healthy heart

Some changes in what you eat may be a good idea following heart treatment. Make time to think about your diet. Watching what you eat will help keep your arteries clear and help you stay well.

For a healthy heart it is sensible to:

- ♥ Eat a variety of foods
- ♥ Choose foods lower in fat
- ♥ Eat the right amount to be a healthy weight
- ♥ Include starchy foods such as bread, rice, potatoes and cereals
- ♥ Include oily fish every week
- ♥ Have five pieces of fruit and vegetables every day
- ♥ Have regular meals and avoid snacks
- ♥ Do not have sugary foods and drinks too often
- ♥ If you drink alcohol, drink sensibly

Eating less fat

Try to reduce the amount of fat in your diet. Whilst we need a small amount of fat in our food to stay healthy, most people eat more fat than needed. Raised cholesterol levels put your arteries at much greater risk of becoming narrowed again. You may be taking drugs to lower your cholesterol level, but a healthy diet is also important. It is worth thinking about the sorts of fats and oils you eat. Different fats have different effects on blood cholesterol levels.

1. It is a good idea to use olive oil and rapeseed oil and spreads made from these.

These contain *mono-unsaturated fat*. This type of oil helps to lower the level of “bad” cholesterol in your blood.

2. Sunflower, corn and soya oil and spreads are made from *poly-unsaturated fat*. These lower the “bad” cholesterol, but in large amounts can also lower the “good” cholesterol in your blood. Use these spreads and oils with care.
3. Eat less animal fats (butter, cream, cheese) and processed foods (cakes, biscuits, pastry). These contain *saturated fat*. These fats can raise the harmful cholesterol in your blood.

Spreads and oils contain all three types of fats, but in different amounts. The nutritional information on the food label can help you choose the best one.

4. *Omega 3* fat is a type of polyunsaturated fat found in oily fish: mackerel, sardines, pilchards, herring, salmon and trout as well as in seeds and some nuts. It has a useful effect on the blood - it helps to make your blood less sticky. We advise you to include oily fish in your diet at least twice a week.

Ways to eat less fat

- ♥ Use spreads and oils sparingly
- ♥ Use 2% or fat-free milk

- ♥ Cheese is high in fat - use stronger varieties and less of it. Grated cheese goes further than sliced cheese
- ♥ Thick cut oven chips are lower in fat than other varieties
- ♥ Natural yoghurt or fromage frais can be used in place of cream or mayonnaise
- ♥ Eat less cake, biscuits, and crisps
- ♥ Choose lean meat. Have smaller portions of meat.
- ♥ Do not fry food

Starchy foods

You can eat *more* of these foods: bread, potatoes, breakfast cereals, rice, pasta, beans, pulses and other grains.

- ♥ Starchy foods are filling, low in fat, cheap and easy to prepare
- ♥ They should form the basis of each meal; many people need to include bigger portions of these at mealtimes
- ♥ Starchy foods are only “fattening” when high-fat ingredients are used in their preparation, e.g. cheese sauce on pasta.
- ♥ Crumpets, crispbreads, English muffins, bagels, fruit malt loaf and teacakes can be useful as snacks - go easy on the spread.

Enjoy more fruit and vegetables

It is recommended that we eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. They can be fresh, frozen, cooked or raw. 1 portion = 100 grams.

- ♥ Try adding fresh or dried fruit to cereal
- ♥ Have thick vegetable soup at lunch time
- ♥ Eat fruit between meals
- ♥ Include 2 portions of vegetables with your main meal

Using less salt

If you have high blood pressure using less salt may help.

- ♥ Many tinned and packet foods are high in salt, as are smoked foods - limit these in your diet
- ♥ Use less salt in cooking and at the table

- ♥ Herbs and spices can be used instead
- ♥ Salt substitutes are not recommended

Make a plan - what change in your diet could make a difference?

Don't forget to let your family know. It may help to write yourself a reminder of any eating changes you would like to make. There is a helpful table at the end of this booklet that you could use.

Your weight

Try to keep your weight at a healthy level. If you are overweight your heart has to work harder. The best way to lose weight is to eat a low fat, healthy diet, and to exercise regularly. Gradual weight loss is sensible - it is not wise to lose more than 1kg per week. Keeping a record of what you eat may help. If you find it difficult to lose weight, contact your nurse or doctor for advice and help.

Sensible alcohol use

Alcohol is fine if enjoyed in moderation. The current advice for the **maximum** amount of alcohol that you should drink is given below. All alcoholic drinks are high in calories. Do not drink much alcohol if you are trying to lose weight or if you have high blood pressure.

Men: 21 - 28 units per week

Women: 14 - 21 units per week

1 unit = 1 standard measure of spirits

1 small glass sherry

1 glass of table wine

0.5 pint beer

Stopping smoking

If you smoke: smoking is a big risk factor in heart disease. If you continue to smoke

it will double your risk of further serious heart problems. Everyone will advise you to

stop smoking. Easier said than done? Help is at hand. Stop smoking services provide:

- ♥ One to one help
- ♥ Group support sessions
- ♥ Advice about nicotine replacement therapy for some people

Your blood pressure

As your heart beats it pushes blood around your blood vessels. The pressure in these blood vessels is your *blood pressure*.

High blood pressure or *hypertension* is an important cause of heart problems. High blood pressure makes your heart work harder. It leads to narrowing of your arteries, including coronary arteries. High blood pressure can also cause strokes, kidney failure and eyesight problems. However, having high blood pressure usually does not make you feel unwell. Most people do not have any symptoms to let them know that their blood pressure is too high.

High blood pressure can be due to:

- ♥ Being overweight
- ♥ Eating too much salt
- ♥ Drinking too much alcohol
- ♥ Not enough exercise
- ♥ Heredity - running in your family

What to do about high blood pressure

1. Have your blood pressured *checked* regularly at your doctor's surgery.
2. If you have been prescribed medicine to lower your blood pressure, please remember to *take this regularly*. If you have any concerns

about this medicine, talk to your doctor. Do not stop taking this medication suddenly.

3. You can help to reduce your high blood pressure by:

- ♥ Being more physically active and fit
- ♥ Maintaining a healthy weight
- ♥ Reducing the salt in your diet
- ♥ Sensible alcohol use

Diabetes

People with diabetes have a higher risk of developing heart disease. If you have diabetes it is very important to monitor and control your blood sugar.

Physical activity

Taking some daily exercise is an important way to keep you and your heart healthy. See the section on exercise.

“Build your exercise up gradually, increasing regularly, and exercise every day. If you are offered a rehab group, take up this offer - it’s well worth it.”

Cardiac rehabilitation programs

Cardiac rehabilitation programs offer regular sessions of supervised exercise. This is tailored to the abilities of those who attend. There is a chance to learn more about your condition, ways to relax, and how to promote better health and protect yourself for the future. Programs cover a number of health topics: healthy eating and lowering cholesterol, the

importance of exercise, the difference between heart attack and angina, and information about your medication. The programs are relaxed, sociable and fun. Experienced nurses and a team of other health and leisure professionals run the rehabilitation programs.

There are many good reasons for coming along to one of the programs:

- ♥ There is good evidence that people who go to cardiac rehabilitation programs recover better, and keep doing well
- ♥ It is an opportunity to learn more about your condition, recovering and staying well
- ♥ It is a good introduction to enjoyable exercise
- ♥ Most people report that they grow in confidence

Cardiac support groups

These are social meetings for people who have had heart problems and their relatives and friends. Activities vary. These may include talks, excursions, walks, social events and fund raising. There is the chance to talk to others who have had similar experiences. Some groups are involved in the planning of cardiac rehabilitation services.

Pacemakers

Following pacemaker implantation patients will receive a comprehensive booklet from the manufacturer of the pacemaker about the do's and don'ts. Pacemakers are placed just below either clavicle. The incision wound is 4-5cm long. The sutures are removed 7-10 days post operation. While we encourage patients to use their arm, we ask them not to lift the elbow above shoulder height for 2 weeks after implantation. The wound should be kept dry. The dressings are not usually changed until suture removal. If

there is any concern about the wound, especially if it becomes inflamed and painful, please contact us immediately.

Useful contact numbers and websites

Vergelegen Specialist Nutrition Centre Tel 021 851 6228
Suite 2f Arun Place, Main Road, Somerset West

Helderberg Cardiac Support Group Cell 079 508
3519
Website: www.helderbergcardiac.co.za

Dr Tom Mabin & Dr Mark Abelson - cardiologists Tel 021 852 9066
Block 4, Vergelegen Mediclinic, Main Road, Somerset West

Dr Johan Nienkemper - cardiologist Tel 021 851 0475
3H Arun Place, Somerset West

Vergelegen Mediclinic Tel 021 850 9000
Main Road, Somerset West

Mr Jeremy Stockhall - physiotherapist Tel 021 852 3458
7N Arun Place, Somerset West

Mr Dan Grobler - biokineticist Tel 021 851 9317
Smart Centre, 4 Lourensford Rd, Somerset West
3993 Cell 082 334

Blaauw & Partners - biokineticists
1 Rue de Jacqueline, Somerset West

Tel 021 852 7148

Smokenders

Tel 021 788 9120

Website: www.smokenders.co.za

The Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Intervention

Website: <http://www.scai.org/SecondsCount/default.aspx>

Useful info regarding accounts you may receive:

If you have an angiogram, angioplasty and/or stents, you can expect to receive accounts from the following:

1. Vergelegen Mediclinic
2. The cardiologist
3. The clinical technologist

There are a few, so it would be one of the following:

- Herbie Steyn, Account Enquiries Tel 021 975 4837
 - Anton Hayes, Account Enquiries Tel 0861 667 667
 - Elizabeth Schneider, Account Enquiries Tel 021 705 2883
4. The radiographer
 - Annalie Fouché, Account Enquiries Tel 0861 106 297
 5. The pathologists
 - Pathcare, Tel 021 852 3144
- Or
- Davies Pathology, Tel 021 851 4172

Time, Day or Date	Planned Activities	How I got on
Example: Week 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="523 488 887 600">2. To start habit of doing home exercises each day before breakfast<li data-bbox="523 611 887 685">3. To walk to local park each day (with my wife)	

Changes I would like to make to my daily diet	How will I go about it

